

The Road

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us over their slender shoulders, neither smiling nor speaking, just watching with blank faces and great eyes. ^K563

We went on, and traveled for many days, breaking camp before dawn, stopping only for a minute for a bite at noon, not stopping again until it was almost dark. We saw no people, no animals, but only the miles and miles of yellow-silver grass and black bushes, and saw the wind that blew across the country twisting the grass from silver to gold, gold to silver. It may have blown for thousands of miles before it touched us, perhaps blown over a Bushman werf tucked away somewhere, one point in the enormous, vast veld that ran all the way to Molepolole and all the way to Ghanzi, hundreds of miles to the south and north to the great river; the veld was just grass, occasionally marked by a little nameless pan, a little salt flat, or a few bushes or thorn trees; it was inhabited only by lonely birds, a few antelope in small herds, a few families of lions, a few Bushmen, as far apart from each other as the stars. The only sound there was made by the wind in the grass or the voices of a few birds singing, the only movement the slow turning of the sun, the moon, and the cold stars, very far away. ^B13

Every morning the sun rose straight up from the flat horizon, salmon red and in a haze of yellow, distorted by the haze into an oblong, and always gigantic, like a monster looming above the poor, dry, stumpy bushes of the veld.

As we went farther and farther into the desert we saw less and less game. The great herds that had once been there were gone, perhaps because it was too dry, although the game antelope do not need to drink water, for they get enough moisture from the grass and roots they eat; perhaps because ^B36

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where the water bearing root Fockea monroi is available the Bushmen may extend their stay in the nutting groves by eating the juicy pulp of this root. If they are fortunate, this water source may tide them over to the next shower, part of which will accumulate in the hollows of trees.

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The first rainfall, however brief, appears to have the general effect of triggering reproduction in animals, and initiating the growth phase in plants. Among the first of the summer foods to appear are the leafy greens Dipcadi glaucum and Talinum crispatum.

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There is no well-defined boundary between the first rains of October and the main rains. J. Marshall mentions that during his periods of field work a gap occurred between the first and the main rains. In 1963 and 1964, however, the showers gradually increased in intensity and frequency from

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October through December. The date of onset and the intensity of rainfall varies greatly from year to year and a delay of even a few weeks in the onset of rain can cause considerable hardship amongst the Bushmen. Furthermore, an initial rain followed by weeks of dry weather is a mixed blessing, for it brings the plants prematurely into leaf and they become scorched and damaged by the subsequent sunshine.

In 1963, the first rain fell on 8 October. In 1964, it did not fall until the 11 November and one noticed that the